

## **Nooit Meer Auschwitz Lezing door Patrick Desbois, 25 januari 2023**

**N.B. Dit is niet de letterlijke tekst van de lezing maar dit zijn de spreekantekeningen van Father Desbois, voor de letterlijke tekst kunt u de video-opname bekijken op de website van het Nederlands Auschwitz Comité.**

I want to speak to the younger generations who were born more than fifty years after the end of the Second World War.

I know that the Shoah may seem to them as if it were their grandfather's or great-grandfather's time.

The question inevitably arises: why teach, transmit today, more than 80 years later, what were the crimes committed against millions of people because they were born Jewish?

With the association I founded, called Yahad-In Unum, I traveled thousands of kilometers from Lithuania to Azerbaijan, filming more than 8,000 people who witnessed the crimes committed against the Jews.

And I was able to see, while the shootings of the Jews were public, in broad daylight, that no shooting of Jews ever became impossible because partisans or soldiers would have attacked.

It took me years to understand that the Holocaust was not a tsunami that swept through Western and Eastern Europe. But that thousands of young men, mostly Germans, murdered with a gun, ammunition, villages, communities, women, men, children, Jewish babies.

Hitler never lacked personnel to kill Jews, sometimes in the most remote village.

It took me a long time to understand the weight of the public nature of the crimes committed. Children, young people would run to find a good place to see the death of their Jewish neighbors with their own eyes, to see it in front of them. Not only did the Jews die in public, but their own neighbors left their farms, their schools, their fields to make sure they could watch the criminal death.

Thus, I would like to elaborate on several points. The crimes, the shootings of the Jews were committed by men who had left Stuttgart, Cologne, Berlin, and were advancing into the Soviet countryside to murder the last Jewish baby. It is true that they had received orders, it is true that European anti-Semitism had clouded the conscience.

But in Europe, coming from an educated, Christian, cultured country, men and women no longer saw Jewish people as human beings but as beings whose every trace had to be erased from the towns and villages where they lived.

So, dear young people, how?

These were not serial killers driven by criminal impulses.

I cannot avoid talking to you about the hallucinatory effect of Nazi propaganda. Not only of their organized functioning. But of the fact that genocidal propaganda produces a kind of erasure of the consciousness, of the sight, of the feelings of the person who will, as a consequence, no longer see anything in the other that was the Jew, a living being to be murdered.

The genocidal propaganda generates thousands of criminals who will, without hesitation, take their own lives. They have become authorized criminals; they kill, they rape, they steal. It was not only an order to kill the Jews but an authorization.

These criminals had not become pure men as they claimed. I have never seen in any Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian or Romanian village killers murdering without taking property and raping young girls before killing them.

This propaganda has led to a number of people in each country who wanted to collaborate in the crimes committed because they too, as blinded, became criminals in large numbers.

It is necessary today to teach that anti-Semitic propaganda, together with xenophobia and self-idolatry, creates potential criminals who suddenly see themselves as entitled to murder in the name of a supposed superiority.

Genocidal propaganda is dangerous; it was so yesterday, it remains so today.

The Shoah by bullets, as it was called, is not only a fact of history. But it has become like a matrix.

Most of the mass crimes, the genocides committed since the Shoah were also not carried out in camps but in broad daylight by killers who shoot and slit throats. We have returned to the terrible times of hand-made genocides. One only has to think of Rwanda, Darfur, the genocide of the Yazidis by Daesh.

I would like to end with this observation: the consciousness of the uniqueness of the human species is fragile and can be broken at any moment if a sudden propaganda envelops a people.

Each of us can become a killer, each of us can also become a victim.

We must teach the crimes committed during the Shoah so that if one day you are present in a country where the wind of madness designates to each one the people to be removed from the planet, your conscience can stand firm.

There were indeed righteous people in Ukraine, in Poland, in Russia, in Belarus.

I have met many of them. They had hidden Jews at the risk of being massacred, they and their families. They were not heroes, but human beings whose simple consciousness of the human race had not been abolished and had stood firm in the face of slogans and propaganda clichés.

To teach the Shoah to young people is to educate them to resist anti-Semitic and racist ideologies which, unfortunately, have not disappeared today.

To become a righteous person is simple, to act as a righteous person requires courage, tenacity and to accept to look with both eyes at those who call for crimes in order to be able to take actions that save the Jew, the other designated as a target.